

**By [CURT THACKER](#) and [MARK PETERS](#)**

A major producer of a ground-beef additive said it is closing three plants after a growing number of supermarkets dropped the product in recent weeks.

Beef Products Inc. said Monday its decision to suspend production of a ground-beef filler at plants in Amarillo, Texas; Garden City, Kan.; and Waterloo, Iowa, would affect more than 650 employees. Its plant in Dakota Dunes, S.D., where the filler is also produced, will continue operating.

The decision came as social networks teemed with concerns about the product, nicknamed "pink slime" because of its appearance.

"The derogatory term has trumped all science, all facts, all history," said Rich Jochum, corporate administrator for Beef Products, which took out a full-page advertisement last week in The Wall Street Journal defending its product. The company didn't indicate for how long production of the filler would be suspended.

The additive, known in the industry as lean finely textured beef, is made from scraps remaining after cattle are butchered into cuts such as steaks and roasts. Processors remove the fat from trimmings, and in some cases treat the meat for bacteria with ammonium hydroxide. The product is then mixed with ground beef, often making it more lean, according to the company.

The filler has been used for two decades, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture says it is safe. But opposition has been building on the Internet in recent weeks because of concerns over the use of ammonium hydroxide and the quality of the meat used in the filler.

In the past week, supermarket chains including Kroger Co., Safeway Inc. and Supervalu Inc., owner of Jewel-Osco and Albertsons, said they would phase out ground beef that uses the additive.

The Department of Agriculture also recently gave school districts the option to receive meat products that don't contain the additive.

The grocers' decision to phase out meat with the filler is expected to ripple through livestock markets.

Industry experts estimate that about 850 million pounds of the additive are used in ground beef annually—meaning processors will have to secure other cuts of meat to replace the filler. That is equivalent to 1.5 million head of cattle a year, introducing new demand into a market where supplies are at historic lows because of a drought in the southern Great Plains.

Agribusiness giant Cargill Inc., another producer of the ground-beef additive, has reduced its output of it as customers move away from the product.

"It has been significantly impacted over the last couple of weeks," said Mike Martin, a spokesman for Cargill.

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